

Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing

Study aims

The Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ALSA) is a population based bio-psycho-social and behavioural study of older adults. The longitudinal data collected in the course of the ALSA study comprises the most comprehensive longitudinal data base yet assembled on ageing Australians and the findings of the ALSA are directly relevant to policy formulation and planning of health and social services for an ageing population.

The study allows assessment of the effects of social, psychological, economic, biomedical, and environmental factors on changes in health, development of disability, general well-being, economic security, use of acute and long-term care services, morbidity, mortality, and 'successful' ageing in people aged 70 and older, particularly in a South Australian context. The research has a number of specific objectives. These include -

- determination of levels of health and functional status of an older population and to track the changes in these characteristics over time;
- identification of factors which promote and maintain health and well being in an ageing population;
- identification of risk factors for major morbid conditions and social, behavioural and other problems among an ageing population;
- analysis of the effects on transitions in health and functional status of age, gender, different patterns of co-morbidity, availability and nature of informal and formal support arrangements, social and economic circumstances, health care provision and utilisation and other variables of interest;
- assessment of the effects of disease processes on functional status and the demand for health care services and both informal and formal long term care;
- examination of the patterns of the need for and the utilisation of informal and formal sources of long-term care as they relate to social support networks, economic and housing conditions, care giving arrangements and the availability of appropriate services; and
- examination of mortality outcomes in the light of changes in health and functional status, medical interventions, self-assessed health, social networks, and individual characteristics.

The inclusion of both survey and clinical components makes it possible to link objective clinical measures with details of the lifestyle, attitudes and personal histories of respondents.

Contact details

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Location of research

Australia, South Australia, Adelaide.

Investigators

The Centre for Ageing Studies is the unit responsible both for the study and for data collection. Investigators include -

- Professor Gary R. Andrews (Director)
- Professor Mary Luszcz
- Dr Michael Clark and others

Content

Main topics covered – Ageing and older people; demography and migration; income, wealth and spending; sex and gender; health and disability; cognition, behaviour, living conditions; and social care and welfare.

Other topics covered – Clinical health measures; general satisfaction; medication; and sleep.

Data availability

The data are only available for scientific research which will not compromise the identity of the respondents. Researchers wishing to use this data should contact the CAS team to discuss the way they potentially wish to use the research. Data is released approximately a year following collection. 8 data files, pdf file, LRECL with SAS and SPSS data definition statements and SPSS export files. Data from ALSA has been progressively archived with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR).

Collaboration with the ALSA Investigators is strongly advised for anyone using the data for further analysis.

Sampling (cohorts/sample size)

Cohort consists of people aged 70 or more living in the Adelaide metropolitan area in 1992. Both community and institutionalised individuals were included. In addition, spouses aged 65 and older of specified persons were also invited to participate, as were other household members aged 70 years and older. The sample was randomly generated from within the Adelaide Statistical Division using the State Electoral Database as the sampling frame.

Baseline interview data collected was from 2087 people, including 566 elderly couples (where at least one partner was aged 70 or more and the spouse was aged at least 65); 1620 baseline participants also provided clinical assessment data. 1779 people were reinterviewed in Wave 2; and 1679 reinterviews and 1423 clinical assessments were conducted in Wave 3. 1504 interviews were conducted in Wave 4, 1171 were completed in Wave 5, and 791 were completed in Wave 6.

Response rate

53.4% of baseline sampled names participated at baseline. 56.3% of people who could be contacted completed a baseline interview. By Wave 2, 90.0% of survivors since Wave 1 were reinterviewed. By Wave 3, 90.9% of survivors were reinterviewed. By Wave 4, 86.8% of survivors were reinterviewed. By Wave 5, 79.8% of survivors were reinterviewed. By Wave 6, 69.9% of survivors were reinterviewed.

Timeframes

1992 – 2003+

- Wave 1: September 1992 – March 1993 (Full study)
- Wave 2: September 1993 – March 1994
- Wave 3: September 1994 – March 1995 (Full Study)
- Wave 4: November 1995 – February 1996
- Wave 5: February 1998
- Wave 6: October 2000 – April 2001 (Full Study)

- Wave 7: October 2003 – April 2004 (Full Study)

Data collected yearly from 1992-1996 and periodically thereafter. Data is released approximately a year following collection.

Methods and data collection

The sample was randomly generated from within the Adelaide Statistical Division using the State Electoral Database as the sampling frame. The sample was stratified by gender and by the age groups 70-74, 75-79, 80-84, and 85 and older.

The initial baseline data collection for ALSA began in 1992 with information being collected for 2087 participants. Components of this first wave included a comprehensive personal interview conducted via Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) instruments, a home based assessment of physiological functions, self completed questionnaires, and additional clinical studies. Personal interviews were carried out at this first wave for 2087 participants and clinical assessments were obtained for 1620 of the participants.

After an interval of one year from the initial interview, respondents were recontacted by telephone. These interviews included questions regarding changes in domicile, current health and functional status, new morbid conditions, changes in medication, major life events, general life satisfaction, and changes in economic circumstances. In Waves 4 and 5, follow-up surveys were also conducted over the telephone.

Waves 3 and 6 involved a full reassessment, again including comprehensive personal interviews, home-based assessments of physiological functions, self-completed questionnaires, and additional clinical studies of most respondents. However, from Wave 3, shorter proxy instruments were used to gather information on some respondents. In Part 2, Wave 6 Clinical Data, information about the health histories of the respondents was elicited, including information on medication, blood pressure, and physical and mental disabilities.

Ancillary data collection has been ongoing since the initiation of the study. Data has been collected from secondary providers, including Domiciliary and Rehabilitation Services, Meals on Wheels, and The Royal District Nursing Society. Lists of ALSA participants are compared periodically with the agencies' lists to determine the prevalence and incidence of receipt of services from these organisations.

Data analysis

Active groups of collaborators are analysing data relating to ADL/IADL performance, cognitive function, comorbidity, cardiovascular disease and risk factors, dental health, diet and nutrition, diabetes, exercise and physical activity, family relationships and support, formal service use, hearing function, injuries and falls, mortality, sensory function, social activities, social interactions between couples, 'successful' ageing and other parameters.

Outputs

Researchers have cited the Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing in almost 200 publications including reports, book chapters, refereed journal articles, abstracts, conference proceedings and theses (see [ALSA Bibliography](#)).

1. Andrews, Gary R., and George C. Myers. AUSTRALIAN [ADELAIDE] LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF AGING, WAVES 1-5 [1992-1997] [Computer file]. 3rd ICPSR version. Adelaide, South Australia: Flinders University of South Australia, Centre for Ageing Studies [producer], 1999. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2000.

2. Andrews, Gary R., and George C. Myers. AUSTRALIAN [ADELAIDE] LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF AGING, WAVE 6: [1999-2000] [Computer file]. ICPSR version. Adelaide, South Australia: Flinders University of South Australia, Centre for Ageing Studies [producer], 1999. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2003.